

Greene County Board of Commissioners

TRAVEL POLICY

March 14, 2013

INTRODUCTION

Purpose: The purpose of these travel policies, rules and general procedures is to provide the fundamental features to promote economy and efficiency in county government and to set the standard in which all employees are treated fairly and equitably.

The travel guidelines outlined in this document are effective on October 1, 2010. These regulations, along with any subsequent updates, are available online at www.greenecountyga.gov.

All departments within Greene County government are required to follow the minimum guidelines outlined in this manual. However, departments are also authorized to establish policies that further restrict an employee's travel if the department determines that stricter policies are necessary. No department is allowed to set more lenient policies than those authorized by the Board of Commissioners.

Anyone with questions concerning the travel regulations should contact the Board of Commissioners office prior to traveling.

DEFINITIONS

- A. COUNTY EMPLOYEE means an employee of any department operating under the fiscal control of the Greene County Board of Commissioners. For the purposes of this Policy, this includes any person receiving a paycheck directly from the Greene County Board of Commissioners, and all persons seeking reimbursement from public funds of the Board of Commissioners, including County Commissioners and the Chairman. This Policy shall not apply to the Constitutional Officers themselves who shall be bound by the provisions promulgated by the General Assembly.
- B. COUNTY BOARD MEMBER means any member of a board established by the Board of Commissioners or required by law to be filled by the Board of Commissioners. This definition includes, but is not limited to, the following boards: Board of Assessors, Board of Elections and Registration, Board of Equalization, and the Planning & Zoning Commission.
- C. COUNTY EXCISE TAX means the local taxes charged by hotel/motels for lodging, also referred to as "hotel/motel" or "occupancy" tax. This tax is separate from the state sales tax. However, this does not include the "resort fee" that may be charged by hotel/motels. Greene County is not exempt from paying resort fees.

- D. EMPLOYEE TRAVEL EXPENSE STATEMENT means the accounting document used as the basis to reimburse an employee or board member for travel and miscellaneous expenses incurred while traveling on official business.
- E. LODGING means a hotel, motel, inn, apartment, or similar entity that furnishes lodging to the public for pay.
- F. MISCELLANEOUS TRAVEL EXPENSE means a necessary and reasonable expense incurred by an employee or board member while traveling on official business. This term does not apply to meals, lodging, mileage or other transportation costs. This term does include parking fees and toll roads.
- G. PER DIEM MEAL ALLOWANCE means the maximum amounts that an employee or board member is allowed to receive as an advance or reimbursement per meal per day.
- H. PERSONAL MOTOR VEHICLE means a motor vehicle that is owned or leased for personal use by an employee or board member.
- I. TRAVEL EXCEPTION means written authorization for travel reimbursement of expenses generally not allowable under this manual. The County Manager is the only person authorized to sign and approve a travel exception.
- J. TRAVEL EXPENSES means meal, lodging, mileage, transportation, and miscellaneous expenses.

GENERAL PROVISIONS

County employees and board members may be reimbursed for reasonable travel-related expenses incurred while on official business for the county. Subject to the provisions outlined in these travel regulations, the Board of Commissioners has authorized reimbursement for the following expenses associated with employee travel:

- Meals associated with overnight lodging and in certain circumstances where there is no overnight lodging;
- Lodging expenses;
- Mileage for certain uses of a personal motor vehicle;
- Transportation expenses, including parking and toll fees; and
- Certain miscellaneous expenses associated with travel.

The specific policies regarding the reimbursement of travel expenses, as well as expense limits and required documentation are outlined in the following chapters. Note that in all cases involving members of the Board of Commissioners where the provisions of this Policy require exercise of application by the County Manager, such exercise of application shall be the responsibility of the Chairman of the County Commission. Any dispute involving County Commission member travel shall be addressed by the full Board if necessary.

Out-of-State Travel

Out-of-state travel requests must be made directly to the County Manager for approval. Generally, out-of-state travel is prohibited; however, in rare circumstances it may be allowed. In order to qualify for out-of-state travel, the employee or board member must provide information to the County Manager showing that the travel is required by statute and that no other option exists to obtain this training within the state of Georgia. The County Manager will review each request for travel out-of-state and will make decisions on a case-by-case basis.

Exceptions to Travel Regulations

Situations may arise in the course of performing job duties that may require employees to incur travel expenses that are generally not reimbursable. The County Manager is authorized to grant exceptions for unusual circumstances. A meeting must be set up with the County Manager to discuss any exceptions to travel regulations prior to actual travel.

AUTHORIZATION REQUIRED FOR EMPLOYEE AND BOARD MEMBER TRAVEL

Employees and board members who are required to travel on official county business and are eligible for travel reimbursement should receive authorization from their department head prior to performing the travel. If required training is available through online delivery options, it is encouraged that such online method be utilized.

Individual departments should analyze training options in advance to determine which sessions offer the most beneficial and cost-effective travel arrangements throughout the year. Employees and board members should make every attempt to obtain training at the location closest to the county. Multiple people in one department should only attend the same conference/training session if it is required by state law. If the session is not required by state law, but is still deemed necessary, only one person from the department should attend the conference/training session unless it is deemed necessary by the Department Head or the Constitutional Officers within their respective offices. This employee or board member should bring back the information learned at the conference and share it with other members of the department.

However, if multiple people within a department are required by law to attend certain training sessions, these employees or board members need to make every effort possible to attend the same training in order to minimize the cost of each training session.

Each department shall maintain records detailing the annual training requirements for each employee or board member. Each department should be able to communicate the number of hours that each individual has attended and is required to attend each year whenever questioned by the County Manager. Each department shall also have on file the statute that requires this training. Failure to maintain these records will result in disciplinary action.

MEALS

Meals Associated with Overnight Travel

Employees and board members traveling overnight will be paid a per diem amount designed to cover the cost of meals, based on the number of meals per day for which the employee is eligible.

Employees and board members traveling overnight are generally eligible for per diem amounts designed to cover the cost of three (3) meals per day for all days on travel status other than the day of departure and the day of return. There are specific instances in which an employee may be eligible for the three-meal per diem rate on departure/return days (see discussion below).

There are also instances in which an employee may not receive per diem for the normally eligible number of meals: If any meal is included as part of the cost of conference registration, etc., such meal(s) should not be considered eligible in the calculation of per diem. For example, if conference registration includes breakfast and lunch, the employee will only receive per diem for the dinner meal. Because most conferences, etc., accommodate a variety of dietary needs/restrictions, employees are expected to participate in such meals.

Day of departure and return. Employees and board members may only receive per diem for meals occurring while officially on travel status. Time for any personal trips should not be included. For example, if an employee departs at 9:00 a.m. on the day of departure, but the conference does not start until the next morning, the employee is not eligible for breakfast or lunch per diem amounts for the day of departure.

Employees and board members must be required to leave by the following times to be eligible for the following meals on the day of departure:

Breakfast – Prior to 6:30 a.m.

Lunch – Prior to 11:00 a.m.

Dinner – Prior to 5:30 p.m.

Employees must not be able to return by the following times to be eligible for the following meals on the day of return:

Breakfast – Before 6:30 a.m.

Lunch – Before 1:30 p.m.

Dinner – Before 7:30 p.m.

Per diem rates. The current per diem rates for meal advances/reimbursements are as follows:

Breakfast - \$7.00

Lunch - \$10.00

Dinner - \$22.00

Meals Not Associated with Overnight Travel

Employees and board members who are required to travel on official county business and do not stay overnight may receive per diem allowances for certain meals under the following situations:

Employees and board members acting as official representatives for their department may receive per diem for meals that are an integral part of a scheduled, official meeting. Per diem is only authorized, however, if the meeting is with persons outside the employee's department and if the meeting continues during the meal.

Employees and board members on official county business who are required to travel outside of the county, but do not stay overnight, are eligible for the per diem for lunch when they leave prior to 11:00 a.m. and do not return until after 1:30 p.m.

Meals while Taking Leave

Employees who take annual leave while on travel status are not authorized to receive per diem for any meal during the period of leave.

Documentation Required for Per Diem Meal Allowances/Reimbursements

NO MEALS ARE TO BE CHARGED TO THE COUNTY CREDIT CARD UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCE.

Employees and board members must turn in the Per Diem Meal Allowance Request Form. Conference itineraries/agendas must be attached to show the beginning and ending dates, locations, times, and any meals provided. If an itinerary is not available, persons traveling need to make every effort to contact someone associated with the conference to obtain an itinerary. This information is required to determine the amount of per diem the employee or board member is eligible to receive. If the itinerary still cannot be obtained, the employee or board member is required to provide information showing the beginning and ending dates, locations, times, and any meals provided to the best of his or her knowledge with an explanation of all efforts made to obtain additional information.

All requests for per diem allowances/reimbursements must be turned in to the Personnel Director for review. (These requests may be turned in prior to or after travel.) Any questions arising from the review will be directed back to the employee or board member prior to payment. If these questions cannot be answered satisfactorily, the issue will be brought to the attention of the County Manager. The County Manager will examine the documentation and will decide on any future actions.

All requests for per diem allowances/reimbursements need to be turned in to the Personnel Director prior to 5:00 p.m. on Monday of the week that the check is required. Checks are printed each Wednesday, but cannot be guaranteed for pickup prior to 12:00 p.m. on Friday afternoons. These deadlines need to be considered in order to ensure that requests are paid when needed. Late submittal of per diem request forms will not result in an emergency check run. Instead, the checks will be cut on the following Wednesday.

LODGING

General Provisions

Employees or board members who travel more than 65 miles from their residence or workplace may incur lodging expenses associated with approved overnight travel. Employees are not allowed to incur expenses for any lodging in Augusta, Macon, Forsyth, or Gainesville without prior approval of the County Manager or the Constitutional Officers within their respective offices. Neither the County Manager or the Constitutional Officer shall permit overnight lodging in the above named locations if the training, conference, or meeting begins at 9:00am or later, or ends at 9:00pm or earlier unless exceptional circumstances, as determined by the County Manager, warrant deviation from this provision.

All lodging expenses should be placed on the county credit card, when possible. The County currently maintains six separate credit cards in order to ensure that employees and board members should not have to pay out-of-pocket for any major expenses relating to county business.

All lodging charges should be reasonable and should exclude all taxes. Employees and board members are required to utilize the most affordable option when staying overnight. Employees and board members are allowed to stay in the hotel/motel that is hosting the conference or event, as long as the employee or board member stays in the basic room. Any upgrades that are requested (ocean-view, larger room, etc.) will be paid by the employee or board member.

Reservations

In order to ensure that no upgrades are requested without the county's knowledge, all reservations to hotels will need to be made by the County Clerk. Employees and board members should submit the Reservations Request Form, which provides the details necessary to make reservations. This form includes an e-mail address to which your confirmation number/paperwork will be sent. This information will be necessary to check in the hotel.

Taxes Associated with Lodging Expenses

Employees and board members should review hotel/motel receipts to ensure that taxes have been applied correctly to their lodging expenses in accordance with state tax laws and regulations. Employees and board members should attempt to resolve any problems with the billing prior to checkout or will be held responsible for these amounts.

Local government officials and employees traveling within the state on official business are exempt from paying county or municipal excise tax on lodging and are exempt from local sales and use taxes. These amounts will only be removed when the lodging is paid by county credit card and when the proper forms are submitted to the hotel/motel. If the lodging is paid by the employee or board member, the room will not be exempt from sales and use taxes.

Resort and Other Fees

Some hotels include a charge for “resort” or other fees. These are not tax-exempt fees, and should be paid, regardless of the method of payment.

Lodging Expenses Incurred while Taking Leave

Employees who take annual leave while on travel status may not be reimbursed for lodging expenses incurred during the period of leave. Board members who extend their stay beyond the training conference or course will not be reimbursed for the additional lodging expenses incurred immediately before or after the training session. These amounts should not be included on the government credit card and are not exempt from any taxes. If an employee or board member chooses to extend a stay for personal reasons, the employee or board member must check out of the room with the county credit card and must check back in using a personal credit card to ensure that personal stays are not included on the county credit card.

If personal stays are included on the county credit card, the matter must be resolved immediately. Failure to notice the error and failure to resolve the problem will result in the revocation of rights to use the county credit card for a period of not less than one year and could result in disciplinary action as determined by the County Manager.

Required Documentation of Lodging Expenses

Detailed receipts for lodging expenses incurred must be turned in to Accounts Payable as soon as possible. A check must accompany each receipt to cover any incidentals (room service, phone charges, etc.) that were charged to the county credit card. Failure to do so will be documented, turned over to the County Manager for review, and could result in disciplinary action.

TRAVEL BY COUNTY-OWNED OR PERSONAL VEHICLES

General Provisions

Whenever possible, employees and board members should utilize county-owned vehicles for any travel for official county business. If a particular county-owned vehicle is assigned to an employee or department, that vehicle should be used for any travel. If no county-owned vehicle is assigned to an individual or department, please contact the County Manager to obtain an available vehicle.

No driver shall operate a county vehicle after alcohol intake of any quantity. The driver must wait until the effects of the alcohol have cleared their system, or at least eight hours, whichever is longer.

County vehicles shall be filled up at the county fueling center prior to travel in order to minimize the fuel cost. If a gasoline purchase is necessary while out of the county, the employee or board member shall fill up the car using cash, a personal credit card, or county credit card.

If a county-owned vehicle is not available for use and the use of a personal vehicle is required, the employee or board member shall be reimbursed at the same rate as the Internal Revenue Service. The mileage reimbursement encompasses all expenses associated with the operation of a personal motor vehicle, with the exception of tolls and parking expenses, which are reimbursed separately.

In instances where a county-owned vehicle is available, but a personal vehicle is used instead, mileage will be reimbursed for business miles traveled at 30% of the Internal Revenue Service standard mileage rate.

To the greatest extent possible, employees and board members are expected to travel together in the same vehicle to minimize expenses to the taxpayers when traveling to the same destination.

Citizens serving on boards and committees of the County will not be entitled to reimbursement of in-county mileage, and, instead, will receive the per diem established for meetings to cover their incidental expenses associated with their service. Likewise, Magistrates will not be entitled to reimbursement of in-county mileage.

Determination of Business Miles Traveled

Employees and board members may be reimbursed for the mileage incurred from the home or workplace, whichever is closest to the destination, using the most direct route available. The total mileage reimbursement request should be reduced by the amount of personal miles traveled during the same trip. In order to compare the reasonableness of any reimbursement request or travel log, the county will use MapQuest, or a similar mapping website, to determine the reasonable amount of mileage that should be charged.

Prohibited Mileage Reimbursement

Employees and board members are not entitled to mileage reimbursement for travel between their place of residence and their official workplace of the county or any personal mileage incurred while on travel status.

Use of County-Owned Vehicles

Employees and board members traveling outside of the county on official county business are required to maintain a travel log documenting the total miles used while in the county vehicle. If any personal mileage is traveled in a county-owned vehicle, the employee or board member will be required to document and reimburse the county for these miles at the IRS Tier 1 Rate.

Required Documentation of Mileage, Parking, and Toll Expenses

All requests for reimbursement of mileage, parking and toll charges must be documented on an employee travel expense statement. The total miles traveled, less any personal miles traveled, should be indicated on the expense statement. This form should also include the travel purpose and destination. Employees and board members are required to claim the mileage on the most direct route from the point of departure to the destination. Deviations from the most direct route need to be detailed on the expense statement. Failure to adequately explain these deviations may result in a reduction in the total amount paid.

Mileage reimbursement requests will be reviewed for reasonableness, using Mapquest or another similar mapping internet site as a guide. When it is determined that the mileage is not reasonable, the matter will be turned over to the County Manager for review. Additional information may be requested regarding the route used, etc. to determine how reasonable the mileage is prior to payment. The County Manager has the final authority to determine the amount of mileage that the county shall reimburse.

Requests for reimbursement of parking fees and tolls paid should also be recorded on the travel expense statement. Employees are expected to obtain receipts for these expenses. If it is not possible to obtain a receipt, then a written explanation should be included on the expense statement.

Other Methods of Travel

Other methods of travel should only be used in rare circumstances and should be approved by the County Manager in advance of travel.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

Miscellaneous Travel Expenses

Employees or board members may be reimbursed for work-related FAX messages, postage expenses, copies or other supplies that may be necessary in order to facilitate county business while away from the office. These items should be documented on the travel expense report as miscellaneous travel expenses and receipts (if available) should be attached.

Registration Fees

Registration fees required for participation in workshops, seminars, or conferences that an employee is directed and/or authorized to attend should be paid directly by the county. In the event that these fees are paid directly by the employee or board member, these expenses may be reimbursed. Paid receipts should be turned in for reimbursement.

When an employee or board member wishes for the spouse or other family member to attend a conference, the employee or board member is responsible for all of the expenses incurred by the family member. If additional fees are required to be paid with the registration fee in order for a family member to attend, these fees should be paid directly by the employee or board member. The employee or board member should attach a personal check to the registration information that is turned in to Accounts Payable. The check should be made directly to the agency responsible for the conference/training. Do not make these checks payable to the Greene County Board of Commissioners. Any personal checks turned in to accounts payable will be sent with the county's payment and the registration information.

Unallowable Expenses

The following expenses are not reimbursable unless specific legal authority has been established:

- Laundry
- Tipping for maid service
- Valet services for parking, when self-parking options are available
- Theater
- Entertainment
- Alcoholic beverages
- Bank charges for ATM withdrawals
- Room service charges
- Personal expenses, including those of a spouse or family member

Travel Advances

The purpose of travel advances is to minimize the financial burden on employees while traveling on behalf of the county. This objective can be accomplished by offering employees and board members use of a county credit card and providing per diem allowances for meals in advance of travel.

County Credit Cards

Employees and board members have access to county credit cards in order to cover lodging costs. Use of a county credit card ensures that the transaction is exempt from taxes and allows minimal out-of-pocket expenses for the traveler.

Employees or board members may check out a county credit card by contacting the Finance Department. Due to minimal credit balances maintained on each credit card, the only travel expenses allowed on the county credit card are lodging expenses and gasoline purchases for county-owned vehicles. No meals are to be charged. Detailed receipts are required to be turned in to Accounts Payable as soon as the credit card is checked in to the Finance Department. Failure to do so will result in revocation of credit card privileges and/or disciplinary action.

Review

All travel-related expenditures will be reviewed closely by the Board of Commissioners Office. Any questions regarding travel expenditures will be directed to the employee/board member involved and/or the County Manager. No payments will be made until the matter is resolved. Continued, questionable travel-related expenditures may result in the denial of any future travel requests.

This Policy shall reflect, and be superseded by, any changes mandated by state or federal legislation that are in conflict with the rules and regulations prescribed herein. Any such changes shall be limited to the conflicting language/provision and shall preserve the intent of the Board of Commissioners to the fullest extent possible. The Board of Commissioners reserves the right to change or modify this Policy at any time and advance notice may not always be possible. As changes or modifications do occur, they will be communicated through standard communication channels.

This Policy shall supersede and prevail over any previously adopted Policy where conflict exists. In any such case, the County Manager shall be responsible for preserving the intent of the Board of Commissioners.